

What does professionalization mean? Developing a conceptual framework of professionalization in sports federations

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Abstract

Professionalization seems to be an appropriate strategy for sports organizations to meet organizational pressure due to challenges of a more complex and dynamic changing environment (e.g. Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). However, despite the increasing number of studies attempting to disclose professionalization in sports organizations, it still remains unclear, what the term professionalization actually mean, and which aspects a suitable concept of professionalization for studying the phenomena should consist in (Dowling et al., 2014). To bridge this gap, we firstly display scholars' perspective of professionalization in sports organizations in order to explore the common ground as well as divergences in previous approaches. We will then consider practical views of Swiss experts to gain valuable insight, as pointed out by Slack (2014), into current thinking and acting towards professionalization in sports federations in Switzerland. In semi-structured interviews, we asked six experts, who accompany the professionalization processes of Swiss national sports federations, about their subjective understanding of professionalization, and its characteristics. The interviews were analyzed applying hermeneutic approach to systematically reconstruct the observed characteristics of professionalization resulting in three main topics: (1) changed management philosophy, (2) specialization and functional differentiation, and (3) management tools. Based on the literature review as well as insights from the Swiss experts, we will provide a synthesis of crucial aspects for developing a conceptual framework of professionalization that can be useful for further studies.

References

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